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ACTION EAP-00

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5674

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY RANGOON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 14203

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PTER, PREL, KS, KN, JA, BA

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHOI OVER
KAL 858, DECEMBER 4

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHOI
FIRST THING FRIDAY MORNING, DEC. 4. RENEWING OUR
CONDOLENCES AND DESIRE TO ASSIST IN ANY WAY WITH ROKG
EFFORTS TO OBTAIN THE FACTS BEHIND THE CRASH OF KAL 858,
THE AMBASSADOR SOUGHT CHOI'S VIEWS ON NEXT STEPS. CHOI
SAID ROKG IS STILL IN FACT-FINDING MODE, AND WOULD LET
JAPANESE TAKE LEAD UNLESS WOMAN WERE IDENTIFIED AS A
KOREAN. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, TIME FOR SUCH AN APPROACH
MIGHT NOT BE LONG DUE TO PUBLIC PRESSURE MOUNTING AGAINST
NORTH KOREA, WHICH IS STRONGLY BELIEVED RESPONSIBLE. MOFA
WILL PROBABLY SEEK TO HANDLE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL BODY
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SUCH AS ICAO, AND USG ENDORSEMENT OF THAT APPROACH MIGHT
HELP. WE ENDORSED MODERATE TONE OF ROKG APPROACH. END
SUMMARY.

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3. THE AMBASSADOR MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHOI KWANG SOO DECEMBER 4 REGARDING KAL 858. ALSO PRESENT WERE ASST. MIN. PARK SOO GIL, ASIA BUREAU DIR GEN SOH BYUNG YONG, AND POLCOUNS.

4. THE AMBASSADOR RENEWED THE DEEPEST CONDOLENCES OF THE USG OVER THE KAL 858 TRAGEDY, AND ASSURED CHOI WE WERE TAKING ALL POSSIBLE STEPS TO HELP THE ROKG GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE CASE. AFTER HE HAD HEARD A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE STATE OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE INCIDENT, CHOI SAID IT NOW SEEMED THE MALE SUSPECT WAS NOT MIYAMOTO AFTER ALL. IT WAS NECESSARY TO CONFIRM THE IDENTITIES OF BOTH HIM AND THE WOMAN STILL IN MANAMA. CHOI UNDERSTOOD THE FINGERPRINTS WOULD ARRIVE IN KOREA THE SAME AFTERNOON VIA KOREAN DIPLOMATIC POUCH. ALTHOUGH THE SUSPICION WAS GROWING THAT THE CRASH MAY HAVE OCCURRED OVER THE OCEAN, THE REAL KEY WAS THE WOMAN IN ANY EVENT. CHOI KNEW SHE HAD A FORGED JAPANESE PASSPORT, AND THE ROKG WAS ASSUMING HER TO BE JAPANESE UNTIL PROVEN OTHERWISE. CHOI UNDERLINED REPEATEDLY THAT THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT STEP WAS TO ESTABLISH HER IDENTITY, AND JAPAN, AND TO A LESSER EXTENT BAHRAIN, WOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN THAT.

5. CHOI CONTINUED THAT THE ROKG SUSPECTED VERY STRONGLY THAT NORTH KOREA WAS BEHIND THE INCIDENT. HOWEVER, PRESIDENT CHUN HAD NOT SAID THE EVIDENCE WAS CONCLUSIVE; FOR NOW THE ROKG WAS NOT LINKING NORTH KOREA DIRECTLY TO THE TRAGEDY.

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6. THE AMBASSADOR COMMENDED THE ROKG'S CAUTION. HE ALSO POINTED TO RECENT LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN THE NORTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT AS BEING INTERESTING AND PERHAPS INDICATING A RETURN TO PROMINENCE OF A HARDLINE GROUP THAT WAS PROMINENT AT THE TIME OF THE RANGOON BOMBING IN 1983. CHOI COMMENTED THAT HE FELT THERE WERE SOME SIMILARITIES BETWEEN KAL 858 AND THE KIMPO EXPLOSION BEFORE THE ASIAN GAMES, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO INDISCRIMINATE KILLING.

7. CHOI SAID THE ROKG WAS NOT AT THIS MOMENT CONTEMPLATING ANY PARTICULAR STEPS IN THE EVENT A FIRM CONNECTION WERE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN KAL 858 AND NORTH KOREA. HOWEVER, THERE ARE PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT SUCH MEASURES -- THEY HAD SIMPLY NOT BEEN DECIDED UPON. THE ROKG COULD NOT WAIT FOR LONG DUE TO THE ENORMOUS PUBLIC

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ATTENTION IN KOREA. (PARK SOO GIL TOLD AMBASSADOR
PRIVATELY AFTERWARDS THAT RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS WERE
MAKING PREDICTABLE NOISES ABOUT RETALIATION, BUT THE ROKG
WAS IGNORING THEM.) IF NORTH KOREAN INVOLVEMENT IS
PROVEN, THE ROKG WOULD STRONGLY CONDEMN IT AND ISSUE A
WARNING. SOME WANT THE CASE TAKEN TO AN INTERNATIONAL
BODY SUCH AS ICAO. CHOI SAID HE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY
SUGGESTIONS THE USG MIGHT HAVE ALONG THOSE LINES.

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8. CHOI CONTINUED THAT IF THE WOMAN WERE JAPANESE, THE
ROKG WOULD COOPERATE WITH THE GOJ. IF SHE WERE KOREAN,
THE ROKG MIGHT SEEK CUSTODY. THE GENERAL FEELING WAS THAT
BAHRAIN WOULD BE HAPPY TO UNLOAD THEIR UNWANTED PATIENT,
AND KOREA AND JAPAN WERE THE MOST PLAUSIBLE RECEIVING
AUTHORITIES. JAPAN MIGHT BE MORE LIKELY DUE TO HER
PASSPORT. THE AMBASSADOR ASKED WHAT THE ROKG WOULD DO IF
IT TURNED OUT SHE WERE A KOREAN RESIDENT OF JAPAN. CHOI
REPLIED THE ROKG WOULD PROBABLY SEEK CUSTODY; IN THAT
CASE, IT WOULD BE IMPORTANT TO COORDINATE WITH THE GOJ TO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 SEOUL 14203

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHOI OVER
OBTAIN JAPANESE AGREEMENT BEFORE APPROACHING BAHRAIN.

9. CHOI ALSO SAID KOREAN AND JAPANESE EMBOFFS HAD SPOKEN
WITH THE MAN AND WERE IN NO DOUBT THAT HE WAS JAPANESE.
NO ONE HAD YET SUCCEEDED IN COMMUNICATING WITH THE WOMAN,
THOUGH EMBOFFS FROM JAPAN AND KOREA WERE ON HAND.

10. CHOI CONCLUDED BY OBSERVING WITH SOME EMOTION THAT
HE HAD PERSONALLY PROMISED A PROMOTION TO AMBASSADOR KANG
-- A 32-YEAR VETERAN DIPLOMAT -- WHEN HE WAS IN BAGHDAD.
HOWEVER, THE INSURANCE MOFA HAS ON DIPLOMATS IN DANGEROUS
POSTS PLUS OTHER BENEFITS WOULD TOTAL ABOUT USD 800,000
FOR KANG'S THREE SURVIVING CHILDREN, ALL OF WHOM ARE IN
AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES: GEORGETOWN, LEHIGH, AND THE UNIV.
OF WISCONSIN.

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11. COMMENT. THE ROKG APPROACH STRIKES US AS MODERATE
AND CORRECT. IN FACT, WE ARE SURPRISED AT ITS RELATIVELY
SOFT HANDLING OF THE NORTH KOREAN ASPECT OF ALL THIS. A
QUICK USG ENDORSEMENT OF CONTINUED HANDLING OF THE CASE
THROUGH A RESPONSIBLE INTERNATIONAL BODY SUCH AS ICAO
WOULD HELP MOFA DETER THE PRESSURES FOR A TOUGHER
REACTION. END COMMENT. LILLEY##

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